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ISSUES IN EDUCATING THE CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED.

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THIS ARTICLE OUTLINES A NUMBER OF ISSUES CONNECTED WITH ESTABLISHING "HIGHER HORIZONS" COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS. SPECIFICALLY DISCUSSED ARE THE DESIGNATION OF "CULTURALLY DEPRIVED" SCHOOLS AND PUPILS, THE IMPACT OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON NONTARGET SCHOOLS AND ON DE FACTO SEGREGATION, AND THE FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF SUCH PROGRAMS. THE GRADE LEVEL AT WHICH COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS MIGHT BE ESTABLISHED, THE POSSIBILITY OF A "HAWTHORNE EFFECT" IN A PROGRAM'S SUCCESS, AND THE CHALLENGE WHICH THE STUDENT'S DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUND PRESENTS TO THE SCHOOL ARE ALSO DISCUSSED. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "PHI DELTA KAPPAN," VOLUME 45, NUMBER 2, NOVEMBER 1963. (LB)

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"Only by confronting the issues squarely and unequivocally will school districts be able to develop successfully their own programs for disadvantaged pupils."

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Issues in Educating the CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED

"The child was diseased at birth, stricken with a hereditary ill that only the most vital of men are able to shake off. I mean poverty—the most deadly and prevalent of all diseases."

—Eugene O'Neill, *Fog*

By BERNARD A. KAPLAN

CULTURALLY disadvantaged youth—and by this we usually mean poverty-stricken youth—are the subject of growing interest among the nation's educators. For the most part, the problem of educating this group is an ancient one, but it is becoming more and more visible as rural slums are transplanted to the great city, where they grow and fester. (The problem still exists in rural areas, of course, in all its depressing forms.[1]) Because urbanization and migration to the cities continue unabated, concern will mount.

Recognition of the problem and initiation of steps to solve it are manifest in many districts across the country. A recent issue of the *NEA Journal*[2] devotes fifteen pages to seven articles on programs and approaches. The progenitor of these programs began as the Guidance Demonstration Project in New York City in 1956. Eminently successful, it was later expanded and renamed Higher Horizons.

The Higher Horizons program served as a model for myriad other programs, including the Ford Foundation Great Cities Grey Areas programs, Houston's Talent Preservation project, Phoenix's Careers for Youth, and Seattle's Disadvantaged Student program. The first state-wide program based on the Higher Horizons formula was started as Project ABLE by New York state in 1961. It provides $200,000 annually in state funds on a 50-50 matching basis to sixteen different city, village, and suburban communities. Four other states are now planning or considering similar programs: Maine, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and California. The California legislature recently approved a proposal for an Environment Enrichment program in which $324,000 in state funds will go to school districts.

While many communities are becoming aroused to the needs and are showing interest, a number of issues connected with establishing Higher Horizons-type programs need discussion.

Issue I. Who Are the Disadvantaged and How Are They Identified?

Are all pupils who live in slum neighborhoods disadvantaged? Do all pupils from minority groups and urban areas qualify for such programs? Should we call them "culturally deprived," "impoverished," "disadvantaged," or something else? Can entire "culturally deprived" schools be se-

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[1] Robert M. Isenberg, "The Rural Disadvantaged," *NEA Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4, April, 1963.
[2] *NEA Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4, April, 1963.

lected for such programs, or do we work with only selected cases within these schools?

Frank Riessman, in his recent book titled *The Culturally Deprived Child,*[3] uses these terms interchangeably: culturally deprived, educationally deprived, underprivileged, disadvantaged, lower class, lower socio-economic. He points out that by 1970 one out of two public school pupils in these cities will be "culturally deprived." Indeed, this is already the case in Washington, D. C., Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia.

Whether we choose to call these pupils disadvantaged, culturally deprived, or economically impoverished, they usually exhibit two characteristics: they are from the lower socio-economic groups in the community and they are notably deficient in cultural and academic strengths. The latter characteristic is usually, but not always, a consequence of the first factor. The parents of these children have simply been unable to provide the quality of background, outlook, initial grounding, and readiness for formal learning that middle- and upper-class parents provide as a matter of course. And all too often our schools have been almost exclusively geared to the mores of the latter group.

Identifying or designating certain pupils or schools as culturally disadvantaged remains a local problem. Sometimes 90 per cent or more of the student body may unquestionably fit this designation, and consequently the entire school may require a special program. In other cases, perhaps 50 per cent of the student body can be regarded as culturally disadvantaged, while in most schools the ratio is more likely one disadvantaged pupil to three up to ten not underprivileged. These latter schools face the problem of how to provide a program for only a portion of the school's enrollment (usually scattered throughout all grade levels), how to select and exclude specific individuals (border-line cases are the toughest), and finally, how this group should be designated. One Project ABLE elementary school in a New York state village has students dispersed throughout the school, with anywhere from one to six in a class of twenty-five to thirty. Another Project ABLE program in a small city not far away has identified its sixth-grade disadvantaged youngsters and brought them together in a pilot program in one classroom under one highly competent male teacher.

As to what terms to use, the impact of labeling individuals or schools as culturally deprived, no matter how accurate this term may in fact be, is best illustrated by what happened to an elementary principal in New York state. As a project director of a "culturally deprived" school, he had so termed it to teachers and board members. At a meeting of representatives from all Project ABLE schools in the state, he found that the neighborhood school he had attended as a boy was a Project ABLE school. When he heard this, his first reaction was, "That's ridiculous! My old school? That neighborhood's not culturally deprived!" The character of the neighborhood may have changed since his day, but the important point is that an intelligent, dedicated individual directing his efforts and ingenuity to improving the educational level of his culturally disadvantaged students failed to recognize the denigrating effect of the phrase until it was applied to *him.*

Most programs for culturally deprived pupils are now being given euphonious (or euphemistic) titles, frequently chosen by the pupils themselves. These titles can be indicative of the purpose and spirit of the programs without overtones of denigration: Higher Horizons, Project ABLE, Operation Bootstrap, Springboard, New Frontiers, Wings, Project Mercury, Project HELP, Talent Demonstration.

Issue II. Are Programs for the Disadvantaged "Fair" to Other School Children?

In districts where special programs have been developed, the provision of extra teachers and counselors, special services, supplies and materials, cultural enrichment trips, and the like are eyed enviously by pupils, teachers, administrators, and parents from non-project schools. This is especially so when the special program is designed for only a segment of the school's enrollment. Some administrators have felt that this is an insuperable handicap and hesitate to develop special programs for this reason. It is also argued that these programs are unfair to non-project children because they cost more on a per-pupil basis.

Such objections are not new to education. They have been raised with regard to special education for the physically handicapped, mentally retarded, gifted and academically talented, and emotionally disturbed. Few people now feel that special educational problems do not merit special programs and additional costs. It is true that a compensatory educational experience for the disadvantaged group almost always entails additional expenditures. However, it can be argued that *equal* educational opportunity for these youngsters does not necessarily mean the same *kind* of education; in most cases, it means equal *plus* more of the same in greater depth, quality, and appropriateness.

If some school board members are reluctant to allocate additional funds to certain sub-groups,

[3] Frank Riessman, *The Culturally Deprived Child.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962.

let them calm their doubts in the knowledge that, almost without fail, these programs bring sparkling dividends which benefit the rest of the school program and the wider community. For example, practices, approaches, and experiences developed by teachers in these programs are often transferrable, with little or no additional cost, to other classes and schools in the district. The impact on the school's morale is evident in this excerpt from a Project ABLE director's report:

> When the project began, a few teachers in the project schools were skeptical of its value. At the end of the first year of operation everyone associated with the project—students, parents, school and community personnel alike—is enthusiastic and hopeful it will be expanded. The most frequently expressed comments are "This is wonderful; let's have more of it!" or "At last we are able to do what we've always known should be done."
>
> At first it was a little difficult to interest teachers in giving the extra time required. Now we have lists of teachers, many from faculties other than those of the project schools, who are anxious to participate.

Finally, school board members and community leaders are beginning to see clearly, especially with regard to school dropouts, that a greater investment *now* constitutes a saving to the community in the long run, when this investment is balanced with resultant lower costs for welfare, unemployment benefits, institutional and rehabilitative services, and greater earnings and citizen productivity.

Issue III. Are Programs for the Disadvantaged Just Another Method of Maintaining De Facto Segregation?

Some educators and observers have wondered whether these programs might not be an attempt to maintain *de facto* school segregation. This is because students in most of the programs are overwhelmingly from minority groups, especially in Northern cities where housing and neighborhood residential patterns have operated to produce *de facto* school segregation in supposedly integrated schools. Segregated schools serving segregated neighborhoods will be excused and even condoned, these people infer, if the programs and services offered by these schools are outstanding and attractive.

These programs, once instituted, in fact tend to produce the reverse effect. Project pupils are given the chance to participate in activities with pupils from all over the school district, often for the first time. Since the purpose of programs for the disadvantaged is to lift the sights and aspirations of these youngsters, the resultant effect, when these attempts are successful, is for greater numbers to select and qualify for academic and honors courses at the high-school level. At this point they associate with white students from middle-class and privileged backgrounds much more frequently and intimately than they otherwise would.

In addition, in view of what has happened to the "separate but equal" doctrine, it is unlikely that the Negro community will tolerate the extension of this practice in a new form, even on a "separate but better" basis.

Programs for the disadvantaged serve to accelerate pupil adjustment, growth in achievement and ability, and readiness, so that these pupils can assume full-fledged membership status in the schools. They develop the ability to benefit from and aspire to whatever opportunities the community's educational system and the future may offer. This is why such organizations as the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS) and the National Urban League endorse them enthusiastically.

Issue IV. Should Programs for the Disadvantaged Concentrate on One Specific Grade Level, e.g., the Elementary Grades?

Some educators argue that programs for the disadvantaged can be most effectively and economically operated if they concentrate at one level, for example, grades 1-3, rather than at a higher level. It is not at all unusual to hear recommendations that "this approach is unquestionably a good one at this level but a far superior job could be done if it had been in effect for these same children one, two, or three years earlier."

Successful or promising programs have been inaugurated at *all* levels.[4] Pre-kindergarten programs for disadvantaged children have been conducted in New York City, Baltimore, and by the state of Pennsylvania's Environment Enrichment program. Kindergarten programs for this group are underway in Racine (Wisconsin), Dayton (Ohio), White Plains (New York), and in Texas for Mexican-American children. Other programs for the disadvantaged cover the full range of grades one through twelve. Project ABLE schools in New York state have programs underway at all levels, although most of them concentrate on grades four through eight. The Higher Horizons program is now operating in grades three through ten.

Indeed, a few colleges have started experimen-

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[4] Daniel Schreiber, "The Dropout and Delinquent: Promising Practices Gleaned from a Year of Study," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 44, No. 5, February, 1963.

tation with programs and admissions policies and procedures for disadvantaged youth. Bronx Community College in New York City has experimented with special pre-college evening courses in literature, composition, mathematics, and basic study skills. Intensified guidance and counseling has been provided for these youngsters. Southern University (Baton Rouge), Dillard University (New Orleans), and Whitworth College (Spokane, Washington) are experimenting with pre-college orientation for these students. Harvard, Brown, and Rhode Island College have relaxed admissions requirements for, and are carefully following up, selected cases.

Since programs are serving the disadvantaged at all levels from pre-kindergarten through college, the important question is not the best grade level on which to focus these activities but rather the most appropriate place to *begin*.

The level at which a school system chooses to introduce its program will depend, of course, on a number of factors, among them staff readiness and leadership, facilities, community resources, and parental support.

Issue V. Do Programs for the Disadvantaged Require Foundation Funds or Outside Financial Support?

Admittedly, foundation grants and outside funds are a great asset in getting a program underway, not only because of the extra monies provided but for the aura of approval and support the staff and the community attach to a foundation program. The Ford Foundation's Great Cities Grey Areas program has provided sizeable amounts of money to metropolitan school districts. The College Entrance Examinations Board and the National Service and Scholarship Fund for Negro Students donated funds to get the original Guidance Demonstration project underway in New York City. The Johnson and Western Foundations have made grants to the Racine, Wisconsin, school system for its experimental program. State funds in New York state and Pennsylvania have permitted their respective state education departments to develop projects.

Nevertheless, in a number of cases school systems have begun their programs with little extra expenditures or with the additional funds provided entirely by the local community. In Norfolk, Virginia, a recent replication of the Higher Horizons program was attempted at that city's Jacox Junior High School without outside support. According to a study by Brazziel and Gordon, programs to help disadvantaged children make better use of public education can be carried out in any school at a modest cost.[5]

Some school systems have already developed special activities for the culturally disadvantaged without outside assistance. The National Urban League's Talent Search Bank approach, utilizing community volunteers and resources, has done this for some time.

Sometimes a small or token appropriation is sufficient to launch a successful demonstration. In New York state during the last few years, the State Education Department has sponsored Talent Search programs in thirty city, village, and suburban school districts. For the most part these are small-scale demonstration projects. NDEA Title V-A funds provided intensified guidance services for underachieving students at the junior high-school level.

In the future, it appears, school systems desiring programs for their culturally disadvantaged students will have to rely primarily on local funds and resources. As with other educational innovations, from programed learning to language laboratories, once educational merit has been established, the introduction of the new program becomes the joint responsibility of the school district and the state.

Issue VI. Is Additional Money All That's Needed To Launch a Successful Program?

Obviously an effective comprehensive program for disadvantaged children requires additional funds. While there may be disagreement about the amount, there is a general consensus that compensatory educational experiences and provisions demand additional expenditures. However, a school district must provide more than money if it is to develop a successful program.

For one thing, even if specialists are added, much will need to be done in the way of orientation and in-service training for the entire staff. Special curricular materials will have to be developed. Program activities, particularly those pertaining to cultural enrichment, work-study experiences, and group guidance will require planning and coordination. If, in addition, team teaching, ungraded primary programs, and other such innovations are to be simultaneously introduced, even greater care must be exercised in making plans. This planning takes time.

Hunter College, Yeshiva University, Newark State Teachers College, and Queens College have each been developing specialized educational programs for their students who will be teaching disadvantaged pupils. The Detroit Public Schools and Bank Street College (New York City), work-

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[5] William F. Brazziel and Margaret Gordon, "Replications of Some Aspects of the Higher Horizons Program in a Southern Junior High School," *Bulletin of the NASSP*, Vol. 47, No. 281, March, 1963.

ing independently, are developing special materials for teaching reading to culturally disadvantaged pupils at the primary level. One school in Chicago developed its own elementary school readers "replete with slums instead of suburbs as motifs and mixed ethnic groups as characters."[6]

Especially important is the need to work with the entire staff of the schools involved. Many teachers, often unconsciously, may be psychologically rejecting these students; all teachers in such a program should have the opportunity to participate in in-service training to examine their attitudes, expectations, and practices with regard to these youngsters.

Issue VII. Is There a Standard Type of School Program for the Disadvantaged That a Community Can Adopt?

Some administrators assume that programs for the disadvantaged can be introduced in much the same way that a new educational practice such as television is added. However, the depth, breadth, and exact form that characterize successful programs vary considerably community to community. Some aspects are highlighted in some schools but assume secondary roles in others. Perhaps the best illustration of the variety that can occur is shown by the forty-two programs described in the recent (February, 1963) publication, *School Programs for the Disadvantaged,* prepared by the NEA's Educational Research Service.[7] While these programs share basic similarities, each is unique and must be viewed as reflecting local needs and local leadership. Each school must design and develop its own. Even the Higher Horizons program provides for variation among schools. No two programs in Project ABLE are just alike, though all were planned and initiated during 1961 under State Education Department auspices.

One community can learn from another engaged in a similar program. Visits by teachers and administrators to programs-in-action help to transplant program techniques and rationales from one community to another. In addition, a growing body of research and progress reports is available to interested districts.

Issue VIII. Are Programs for the Disadvantaged Unduly Influenced by the "Hawthorne Effect"?

These programs, it is claimed, are effective not because of the specific techniques and activities employed but because the children involved feel that they have been selected for special consideration. Given a sugar pill which he thinks is an aspirin, the child reports that his headache has disappeared (the "Hawthorne effect"). It is asserted that it's not *what* is done but merely that something "special" is done and that students know they have been selected for this something special; the end result will still produce substantial improvement in behavior, although the changes may be only temporary.

The research now underway with experimental and control groups will eventually illuminate the validity of these charges. However, it does appear from the evidence already reported that substantial gains in the performances of pupils (test scores, class marks and standings, attendance, educational and vocational goals) and of schools (holding power, discipline, scholarship awards, teacher retention) are achieved merely by the introduction of these programs. Such gains as improved reading skills and increased holding power are not ephemeral in their effect on student achievement and accomplishments. Though student performance *may* no longer continue to improve with a cessation of program activities (thereby supporting the thesis that the "new" motivation is not fully integrated), it is likely that this criticism applies equally well to other facets of the school program, e.g., extracurricular activities or guidance services.

The goal of most Higher Horizons-type programs is to convey to each disadvantaged pupil the feeling that he is the focus of the school's concern and attention. This may be a distinct revelation for many of these pupils. Unless correspondent traits are manifested by the staff and effectively communicated to the pupil and his parents, these programs fall short of their objectives. Some observers feel it is this aspect of the program more than any other that produces the desired changes. Others feel that improved techniques and methods and new opportunities are the key components. Still a third group contends that it is a combination of these two approaches. Of course the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. The Hawthorne criticism, however, applies mainly to the first and third views, i.e, heightened motivation, no matter how it is produced, will bring about (similar) change in student performance. If this is true, a logical question is, What alternative (more effective, less costly, or more efficient) "sugar pill" activities might realistically be substituted?

Some experts suggest that these programs can accomplish their objectives by eliminating all but one or two features, these varying with the needs or resources of the community. Recent research evidence regarding motivation and underachievement suggests that these two phenomena are high-

[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Educational Research Service, *School Programs for the Disadvantaged,* National Education Association, 1963.

ly complex; therefore, it appears unlikely that oversimplified or "shortcut" solutions will produce similar changes in student behavior. In fact, even in full-scale Higher Horizons programs, where activities are multiple and varied, a minority of students make no gains.

The importance of motivation, attitudes, and the student's self-image in these programs must not be minimized. The frequency with which these programs report noticeable positive change, first in student demeanor (dress, attendance, interest, speech), and subsequently in academic accomplishments (grades, levels of achievement, skills) emphasizes the importance of including consideration of student attitudes in programs for the disadvantaged.

Issue IX. Do Programs for the Disadvantaged Overlook or Minimize the Attributes of the Culture of These Children and Their Families?

The term "culturally deprived" is now viewed with some disfavor by certain sociologists and educators; more accurate terms, they submit, are "culturally different" or "economically deprived." They maintain that children from impoverished families are *not* culturally deprived in the sense that they are culture*less*. Rather, their cultures and heritages *differ* from those cultivated by the middle-class schools they attend. Programs for the disadvantaged, they say, disregard the special strengths of this group, e.g., their folk humor, physical or manipulative propensities, pragmatism, etc., and condescendingly regard these children as having little if anything positive to offer or to build on in the classroom.

Some critics scold the schools for their rejection of the "culture of poverty" and insist that many of these youths who, in turn, reject the schools by dropping out are wiser and more realistic than their peers who choose to remain.[8]

The claim that school personnel in general and programs for disadvantaged specifically minimize potential non-middle-class contributions and meritorious qualities is probably a fair appraisal. However, there is evidence now that many programs are attempting to foster in their staff a better understanding of the community's disadvantaged and to adapt and develop materials and methods accordingly. For instance, primary readers and materials more realistically attuned to the actual experiences and backgrounds of these children are being developed. (The Board of Education of New York City has recently served notice on textbook publishers that it would no longer purchase social studies texts which do not adequately treat minority groups and deal realistically with intergroup tensions and efforts to relieve them. Other large city systems are considering similar stands.) The New York State Education Department has developed curriculum materials pertaining to the Negro in American history and American society today.[9] The Washington, D.C., public schools are developing similar materials.

Special courses for teachers in training and teachers in service help school personnel gain a better understanding of varying cultural and ethnic groups and their problems. Some programs for the disadvantaged make provision for home visits by teachers and counselors or arrange for periodic, informal discussions with small groups of parents (numbering four to six) in the school. These attempts at improved parental communication and participation also give school personnel more accurate perspective and insight regarding the backgrounds, values, and orientations of disadvantaged families.

Do programs for the disadvantaged, by their mere existence, indicate that the cultures and values of these groups are meaningless and unworthy of consideration in the schools? Are these programs set up primarily to stamp out cultural differences and to fill the void with values, goals, and habits deemed more acceptable to "society" by school board members or administrators? If this were the case, it would do great violence to the American democratic tradition. It seems more likely that the real aim of these programs is not the blurring and subjugating of differences so much as providing underprivileged pupils with the tools of an education adequate to guarantee them the competence to make their own choices and decisions regarding how they wish to live, to work, to play. Otherwise, their choices are restricted by immediate circumstance and limited environments. As the Educational Policies Commission has pointed out,[10] "If the problem of the disadvantaged is to be solved, the society as a whole must give evidence of its undifferentiated respect for all persons."

The commission further asserts:

> The problem of the disadvantaged arises because their cultures are not compatible with modern life. One of the greatest challenges facing the United States today is that of giving all Americans a basis for living constructively and independently in the modern age. *The require-*

[8] Edgar Friedenburg, "An Ideology of School Withdrawal," a chapter in the forthcoming NEA publication, *School Dropouts*, Daniel Schreiber, editor, scheduled for late 1963.

[9] The New York State Education Department, *Intergroup Relations, Resource Handbook for Elementary School Teachers; The Negro in American History*, Division of Intercultural Relations in Education, The New York State Education Department, Albany 1, N. Y., 1963.

[10] *Education and the Disadvantaged American*, Educational Policies Commission, NEA, 1962.

ment is not for conformity but for compatibility. To make all people uniform would be as impractical as it would be inconsistent with American ideals. *To give all people a fair chance to meet the challenge of life* is both practicable and American. [Italics added]

JACOB Landers, coordinator of New York City's Higher Horizons program, in answer to the question, What makes a successful Higher Horizons school?[11] said:

> No amount of increased appropriations, and no change in procedures or organization, can be effective without a fundamental faith in the ability of the children. It is not enough to know intellectually that Negro and Puerto Rican children can learn as well as other children. It must be felt in the marrow of the bones and in the pit of the stomach.
>
> This belief in the children and pride in their accomplishments must run like a golden thread through the fabric of the school's daily existence. With this feeling, the school poor in services can yet be rich in achievement; without it, the richest services yield but the poorest results.
>
> Our great enemy is the phrase "as well as can be expected." It implies that the school merely reflects the community, but cannot affect it. It implies an acceptance of the *status quo*, rather than a struggle to change it.
>
> The true Higher Horizons program spreads faith in children and hope for their future.

The variety of programs which have been developed illustrates that this faith in children and hope for their future can be expressed and fostered in different ways. There will naturally be questions about the most practicable, economical, and beneficial kind of program to develop in a given community. These questions are embraced by the issues discussed here. Only by confronting these squarely and unequivocally will school districts be able to develop successfully their own programs for disadvantaged pupils.

[11] *Higher Horizons Bulletin*, December, 1962, Board of Education of the City of New York.

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